

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 18867

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SUBJECT: A DEFENSIVE DEFENSE OF SOVIET NATIONALITY (ESPECIALLY
JEWISH) POLICY

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. DECEMBER 1 LITGAZ OFFERS A FULL PAGE
DEFENSE OF SOVIET NATIONALITY POLICY BY V.P. RUBEN,
CHAIRMAN OF THE USSR SUPREME SOVIET'S SOVIET OF NATIONALITIES.
A QUESTION AND ANSWER FORMAT ALLOWS RUBEN TO REBUT OSTENSIBLY
POINTED (BUT ACTUALLY LEADING) QUESTIONS PUT TO HIM BY A
LITGAZ CORRESPONDENT, AND TO DEPICT THE USSR AS A HARMONIOUS
AND HAPPY FAMILY OF NATIONALITIES. THE DISCUSSION OF VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF THE NATIONALITY QUESTION LEADS INTO VEHEMENT
CONCLUDING DENIAL BY RUBEN OF ALLEGATIONS THAT SOVIET
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JEWS SUFFER SYSTEMATIC OPPRESSION AND DISCRIMINATION IN
THE USSR, SUGGESTING THAT THIS WAS THE REAL PURPOSE

OF THE WHOLE EXERCISE. END SUMMARY. END CONFIDENTIAL

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

2. THE OFFICIAL VERSION OF THE SOVIET NATIONALITY POLICY RECEIVED A FULL AIRING IN A FULL PAGE DECEMBER 1 LITGAZ INTERVIEW WITH V. P. RUBEN, CHAIRMAN OF THE USSR SUPREME SOVIET'S SOVIET OF NATIONALITIES. SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT V. ALEKSANDROV FED RUBEN A SERIES OF OSTENSIBLY POINTED QUESTIONS WHICH WERE FIELDIED BY THE LATTER IN DEMONSTRATING THAT THE USSR CONSISTS OF A HARMONIOUS HAPPY FAMILY OF NATIONALITIES.

3. THE QUESTIONS BEGAN GENTLY ENOUGH, ALLOWING RUBEN TO BEGIN WITH FUNDAMENTAL PRIMER-BOOK CONCEPTS: THAT THE USSR IS A MULTI-NATIONAL STATE CONSISTING OF SOVEREIGN CONSTITUENT REPUBLICS ENJOYING RIGHTS OF SECESSION, OF MAINTAINING ARMED FORCES, AND OF CONDUCTING DIRECT RELATIONS WITH "FOREIGN" STATES.

4. QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW UNION REPUBLICS DEFENT THEIR INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS ON THE CENTRAL ALL-UNION GOVERNMENT LEVEL, AS WELL AS IN THE FORMULATION OF CENTRAL STATE POLICY, YEILDED BLAND REASSURING ANSWERS. NEXT, THE QUESTIONS PROBED THE RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF UNION REPUBLICS AS REFLECTED IN DIFFERENCES IN THEIR LEGISLATION IN SPECIFIC AREAS OF NATIONAL STATE LIFE. SAMPLE ANSWER: MOST UNION REPUBLICS SET THE MINIMUM AGE OF MARRIAGE AT 18, BUT UKRAINE AND UZBEKISTAN SPECIFY 18 FOR MEN AND 17 FOR WOMEN. IN A DISPLAY OF DISSATISFACTION, ALEKSANDROV NOTED THAT SUCH EXAMPLESARE, "AFTER ALL, NOT SUBSTANTIVE IN CHARACTER", AND SUCCEDED IN OBTAINING SAMPLES OF "SUBSTANTIVE" DIFFERENCES. SAMPLE: SOME MINOR DIFFERENCES IN THE CRIMINAL AND LABOR CODES OF UKRAINE, ZUBEKISTAN AND MOLDAVIA. STILL PERSISTING, HE DEMANDED, AND GOT, EXAMPLES WHERE SOME REPUBLICS HAVE LAWS NOT FOUND IN OTHER REPUBLICS. SAMPLE: LEGISLATION IN ESTONIA AND TURKMENIA AGAINST CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AND BIRDS. AN EASY QUESTION ON THE SUBJECT OF MIXED MARRIAGES WAS FOLLOWED UP BY A TOUGHIE: CONFIDENTIAL
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WHAT ABOUT THE ALLEGED TRENT, NOTED IN THE WEST, THAT SOVIET "BORDERLANDS" WERE POSING A THREAT TO RUSSIAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE BECAUSE OF THEIR RAPID NATIONA DEVELOPMENT? RUBEN COUNTERED THAT THIS FORMULATION REVERSED EARLIER CHARGES IN THE WEST THAT NON-RUSSIAN NATIONALITIES WERE BEING THREATENED BY RUSSIAN CHAUVINISM AND POLICIES OF ENFORCED RUSSIFICATION. ACCORDING TO RUBEN, MUCH MORE TO THE POINT WAS THE POLICY AND "TRADITION" OF ALL SOVIET NATIONALITIES TO HELP EACH OTHER, SO THAT ALL WERE ABLE TO CATCH UP, ECONOMICALLY AND CULTURALLY, TO

THE MOST DEVELOPED AREAS AND NATIONALITIES.

5. AGAIN, IN RESPONSE TO "SHARP" QUESTIONING, RUBEN DENIED THAT MINORITY NATIONALITIES LIVING IN AREAS OF ONE PREDOMINANT NATIONALITY WERE SUBJECTED TO ANY KIND OF RACIAL OR NATIONAL DISCRIMINATION. HE CITED THE NATIONAL COMPOSITION STATISTICS OF ALL-UNION, REPUBLIC, AND LOCAL SOVIETS, WHERE ONE COULD FIND EVEN REPRESENTATIVES OF NATIONALITIES "WHICH DO NOT HAVE ON OUR TERRITORY THEIR OWN NATIONAL STATE ENTITIES. SUCH AS BULGARIANS, GREEKS, KOREANS, GERMANS, POLES AND FINNS."

6. THIS CONTEXT PROVIDED RUBEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO DENOUNCE ALLEGATIONS BY "ZIONIST PROPAGANDA" THAT SOVIE JEWS WERE SUBJECTED TO SYSTEMATIC OPPRESSION AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE USSR:

-- OVER 35,000 JEWS WERE DEPUTIES TO VARIOUS SOVIETS;

-- JEWS ARE REPRESENTED ON THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, "INCLUDING A DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE USSR COUNCIL OF MINISTERS";

-- JEWS PUBLISH FREELY, BOTH IN YIDDISH AND OTHER LANGUAGES (CHIEF EVIDENCE: SHOLEM ALEYKHEM AND SOVIETISH HEIMLAND);

-- THE JEWISH NATIONAL THEATER, AS WELL AS NUMEROUS DRAMATIC AND MUSICAL GROUPS, PERFORM IN YIDDISH TO AN AUDIENCE OF ABOUT HALF A MILLION ANNUALLY:

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-- JEWS ENJOY THE "RIGHT" TO USE THEIR LANGUAGE IN GOVERNMENT OFFICES AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS, ON RADIO AND TELEVISION, AND TO PROVIDE LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION TO THEIR CHILDREN.

IN CONCLUSION, RUBEN DENIED THAT THE ROLE OF RUSSIAN AS THE COMMON LANGUAGE OF CONVENIENCE AMONG ALL NATIONALITIES CARRIED ANY FLAVOR OF "RUSSIFICATION."
END UNCLASSIFIED, BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL.

7. COMMENT. THE DEFENSIVE TONE OF RUBEN'S STATEMENT OF THE OFFICIAL VERSION OF THE SOVIET NATIONALITY POLICY MAY BE USED BY STUDENTS OF SOVIET AFFAIRS FOR SOME TIME TO COME AS A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF REFLEX SOVIET RESPONSE TO PERSISTENT CRITICISM AND UNFAVORABLE PUBLICITY FROM ABROAD. RUBEN'S CONCLUDING EMOTIONAL ASSERTION THAT SOVIET JEWS HAVE ALL THE FREEDOM THEY COULD POSSIBLY USE-- REplete WITH 1930'S RHETORIC ABOUT BIRODIDZHAN

(ALTHOUGH BIROBIDZHAN IS NOT MENTIONED BY NAME)-- WILL
BE THE SUBJECT OF SCATHING SARCASM BY THE SOVIET JEWISH
COMMUNITY. MOSCOW'S JEWS MAY WELL MOVE TO TEST, UNDER
CONDITIONS OF MAXIMUM PUBLICITY FROM WESTERN CORRESPONDENTS,
THE VALIDITY OF RUBEN'S ASSERTIONS ABOUT THE RIGHTS
THEY ARE SUPPOSEDLY ENJOYING.

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